



President Shelly delivers State of the Navajo Nation address in Navajo

Highlights spirit of cooperation between Executive and Legislative Branches



President Shelly delivered the State of the Navajo Nation to the 23rd Navajo Nation Council on Monday. He said the only way things get done is by working together and compromising. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.— President Ben Shelly delivered the State of the Navajo Nation on Jan. 25, outlining significant accomplishments from the past quarter and providing a vision for the future.

Flanked by Vice President Rex Lee Jim and Chief of Staff Arbin Mitchell, the president delivered his address in Navajo and highlighted the partnership between the Executive and Legislative Branches that made the accomplishments possible.

He began with lauding the efforts between both branches to fund the remediation of Administration Building No. 1, which reopened in early Jan. Funding came from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance, indirect costs and carryover funding, which totaled more than \$5.5 million

for construction.

“Several tribal divisions and departments stepped up to the plate and housed our displaced employees until the building could be renovated,” President Shelly said.

He noted that the health and welfare of tribal employees was the primary concern and that renovations have already begun on Administrative Building No. 2, which was also shutdown due to black mold infestation. The president said construction was expected to begin by the spring of 2015.

President Shelly said he approved \$8.3 million in supplemental funding for chapters on Jan. 6. The approval came after discussions with his legal counsel and the Office of Management and Budget.

“Some of these projects

were not in compliance with the Appropriations Act, but we worked around that to approve the projects because of their importance to their respective chapters,” he said.

The president also mentioned that the Appropriations Act states that project funding will be approved only if they are listed on the five-year CIP plan, which was recently approved in the summer of 2014 after 14 years of limbo.

He said fiscal conservatism resulted in a \$30 million surplus in the UUF, which was in the red by \$22 million when the Shelly-Jim administration took office.

“I loosened the purse strings,” President Shelly said.

\$500,000 was approved for the Oljato Chapter to pay professional technical services

for the architecture and design of their new multipurpose building. \$5 million was approved for the Nahata Dzil shopping center. Tonalea-Red Lake Chapter was approved for \$500,000 for their demolition project. Cameron Chapter received \$180,120 to go toward their new multipurpose facility. Navajo Transit System will purchase a new bus with the \$600,000 that was approved. And finally, more than \$1.5 million was approved for elected officials to receive operating, planning and regular chapter meeting expenses.

President Shelly spoke of the repatriation mission to Paris, which was undertaken by Vice President Rex Lee Jim on Dec. 11, 2014. The purpose of the trip was for the return of sacred Yei Bi Chei masks that went up for auction by a private collector.

Members of the Navajo Human Rights Commission and the Navajo Nation Washington Office joined the vice president.

Seven masks were purchased at a cost of \$9,000 by the Navajo delegation before they went on auction. The president said the action sent a message to the world that sacred cultural resources should not be sold and that they violate the human rights of indigenous people around the globe.

President Shelly said, “We are grateful for the efforts of the U.S. State Department, U.S. Embassy-Paris and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for their assistance in returning these traditional masks back to the Navajo Nation.

The president also spoke about a Dec. 8, 2014 town hall meeting in Gallup regarding the Gallup Detoxification Center. He said more funding was needed to address the alcoholism epidemic in the city.

In June 2013, the former Na’Nizhoozhi Center Inc. closed its doors after providing more than 20 years of service when funding dried up. Realizing the importance of the facility, the Navajo Nation invested funding and reopened it as Gallup Detox Center.

“To date, we have spent more than \$1.6 million providing services,” President Shelly said. “Despite our partnership with the city, it is not enough to operate the facility and provide needed services.

“We are looking at more than \$2 million annually that is needed,” he added.

The president also mentioned a House bill on Indian Energy that was introduced during the 113th Congress by Congressman Don Young, chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee.

“The bill proposed to streamline the federal bureaucratic process in energy development for large land base tribes,” President Shelly said.

After passing the House, the bill is now at the Senate for deliberation. The Navajo Nation Washington Office reported that the bill would be reintroduced in the 114th Congress. Another bill being monitored by the D.C. office is the Indian Trust Asset Reform Act, which proposes authorization of an eight-year trust asset demonstration project that would enable tribes to develop plans.

President Shelly also praised the enactment of the Navajo Department of Health and said it was a major step toward tribal self-determination because it allows the Navajo Nation to regulate healthcare on tribal lands.

“Our newly formed Navajo Department of Health will ensure

the public health service needs are met through assessments, policy development and quality assurance,” he said.

While changes won’t happen overnight, the president said creation of the first tribally administered Medicaid agency was a possibility, after a recent feasibility study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The president also mentioned a recent visit by members of the U.S. Congress to follow up with the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe on report by the Office of the Inspector General. The report was on the status of the federal relocation program administered by the Office of Navajo Hopi Indian Relocation Program.

President Shelly said the federal government’s failed relocation program that was imposed on tribal members has resulted in dismal living conditions.

“We have many families without running water, electricity and unfinished homes. Others are still awaiting relocation,” he said.

The Navajo Nation encouraged the federal delegation to continue funding ONHIR and provide for adequate benefits to all families forced off their ancestral homelands more than 41 years ago.

President Shelly concluded that it is his responsibility to ensure continuity of government and direct services to the Navajo people, regardless of the political climate that exists.

“Vice President Jim and I stand prepared to continue providing stability for these government functions until a new president has been elected and installed into office,” President Shelly said.



President Shelly was flanked by Vice President Rex Lee Jim and Chief of Staff Arbin Mitchell during the State of the Navajo Nation address on Monday. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



LoRenzo Bates was nominated and took the oath of office as the Speaker of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council after council delegate Alton Joe Shepherd stepped aside when votes were knotted at 12-12. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



The State of the Navajo Nation, as delivered by Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly, was accepted by the 23rd Navajo Nation Council by a vote of 20-0-4. (Photo by Rick Abasta)